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Urban Initiatives Program

RESOURCE GUIDE

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Urban Initiatives Program

Description:

The Urban Initiatives (UI) program was established in Article 16-A of New York State Private Housing Finance Law. The Urban Initiatives program is administered by the Office of Community Renewal (OCR) under the direction of the New York State Housing Trust Fund Corporation (HTFC).

The purpose of the Urban Initiatives program is to provide financial/technical resources to New York communities for the restoration and improvement of housing, commercial areas and public/community facilities in urban neighborhoods. This program will provide grants to not-for-profit community based organizations and charitable organizations that have a direct interest in improving the health, safety and economic viability of a distressed urban neighborhood or other aspects of the area environment that are related to community preservation or renewal activities. The UI program provides applicants flexibility in determining the exact nature of their revitalization efforts and program priorities.

Eligible Activities:

Applicants may request between \$50,000 and \$200,000 to undertake housing preservation and community renewal activities in distressed neighborhoods by preserving existing housing units, generating new housing units, upgrading commercial and retail areas and by creating innovative approaches to neighborhood and community revitalization which improve cultural and community facilities.

UI funds may be used for project expenses incurred subsequent to contract execution including: renovation, rehabilitation, demolition, and/or clearance and sealing of any building or other structure, provided that such funds may not be used for planning of any such activity or for operating an office to be used by the qualified applicant and, provided further that no funds shall be used for acquisition unless such acquisition is in conjunction with the renovation, rehabilitation, demolition, clearance, or sealing of any building or structure. Applicants must specifically demonstrate how the project contributes to local planning and development efforts.

UI funds may be used for fees to consultants retained by the qualified applicant to provide the eligible services identified above.

Eligible occupants of UI projects are persons and families whose income does not exceed 80% of the area median income for the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) or county in which the project is located. Non-residential projects must benefit municipalities in which at least 50% of the population has incomes of 80% or less of the area median income for the MSA or county in which the project is located.

Eligible Types of Applicants:

Eligible applicants include not-for-profit corporations or charitable organizations, which are either incorporated under the not-for-profit corporation law (together with any other applicable law) or, if unincorporated, are not organized for the private profit or benefit of its members. The applicant must have been engaged primarily in relevant community preservation activities for at least one year prior to application. The applicant's officers, directors and members must be representative of the residents and other legitimate interests of the neighborhood.

Eligible Areas:

Eligible areas for Urban Initiatives projects are neighborhoods within units of local government in New York State. Eligible units of local government include cities, towns or villages with a population of 20,000 or more.

An eligible neighborhood for UI projects shall mean an area: (a) that has experienced sustained physical deterioration, decay, neglect, or disinvestment; (b) has a number of substandard buildings or vacant residential or commercial units; **and** (c) in which more than fifty percent of the residents are persons whose incomes do not exceed eighty percent of the area median income for the county or MSA in which the project is located, or which is designated by a state or federal agency to be eligible for a community or economic development program.

Projects demonstrating a direct benefit to persons and families whose incomes do not exceed eighty percent of the area median income for the county or metropolitan statistical area (MSA) in which a project is located are not required to meet the criterion (c) above.

Pre-Application Requirements:

Each municipality in which the proposed program will function must approve a formal resolution supporting an application for the proposed Urban Initiatives project. The resolution must be on official stationery and should hold the official seal. Applicants within New York City must obtain the resolution from the Community Board with jurisdiction over the project target area.

Funding Priorities:

UI was established to improve distressed urban neighborhoods by preserving existing housing units, generating new housing units, upgrading commercial and retail areas, and by creating innovative approaches to neighborhood and community revitalization which improve cultural and community facilities. Applicants able to successfully demonstrate broad local support and linkages between the proposed project and local planning and development efforts will receive priority consideration. Applicants documenting high percentages of committed matching and leveraged funds will receive the highest scores.

Ineligible Activities:

UI funds can be used for renovation of facilities, but cannot be used to cover the day-to-day operational costs, nor can funds be used for buildings that are primarily for the general conduct of government business (i.e. town halls).

Application Selection Criteria – up to 100 Points:

Total Vision and REDC Strategies –20 points

Rates the degree with which the proposed project aligns with the Regional Council’s Strategic Plan.

Need - 10 points

Measures the severity of need for the proposed UI project activity, based on the analysis of existing commercial and residential conditions in the target area. The needs described must correspond to the proposed activities and the extent to which the activity resolves or addresses the identified need, as this will form the basis for the impact score in the following section. Each application will be rated in comparison with all other applications received.

- Residential need (up to 5 points)
Evaluates the severity of need for affordable housing or rehabilitation of the existing housing stock and vacant buildings in the proposed target area.
- Commercial need (up to 5 points)
Evaluates the extent of need for commercial investment in the proposed target area that the private sector alone has been unable to provide.

Impact - 25 Points

Measures the extent to which the activities described in the application will have a positive public benefit and sustainable positive impact on the target area and surrounding community and neighborhoods. In part, this rating is based on the proposed strategy of using Urban Initiatives resources to stimulate private investment to revitalize the targeted commercial area and nearby residential neighborhoods.

- Residential impact (up to 5 points) - Evaluates the likelihood that investment of UI funds will preserve or improve housing units in the neighborhood. Projects that propose meeting affordable housing needs through the creation of residential units on upper floors of mixed use buildings are strongly encouraged. Applications determined to have the greatest impact on increasing the availability of quality, affordable housing, when compared with all other applications, will receive the highest scores.
- Commercial impact (up to 5 points) - Evaluates the likelihood that investment of UI funds will improve the aesthetics of the commercial corridor, spur investment of private resources, and mobilize additional resources to sustain commercial assets. Applications determined to have the greatest impact on business conditions, when compared with all other applications, will receive the highest scores.
- Program Support (up to 15 points) – Evaluates local support and linkages between the proposed project and local planning and development efforts.

Leveraging - 15 Points

Measures the extent to which the UI resources will result in additional investments committed to the projects. Applicants documenting high percentages of committed matching and leveraged funds will receive the highest scores.

Implementation Capacity - 30 Points

Measures the extent to which the applicant has organized the proposed project and has assembled sufficient resources to complete the project, and achieve the goals and objectives of the program in a manner that is timely, effective and on-budget. Applications submitted by current awardees with open, on-going HCR contracts may be negatively impacted if substantial expenditures or funding commitments have not been achieved. An applicant's past and current performance in other state programs and contracts will be considered in rating and ranking its application.

- Experience (up to 5 points) - Up to 5 points are available to applicants who have a successful record of achievement within the community where the proposed project is located, and have assembled a team with experience in community development, housing rehabilitation, and/or commercial revitalization in mixed-use districts on a scale comparable to the proposed program or projects.
- Implementation Capacity (up to 25 points) – Proposals that have identified specific projects, obtained local approvals, and have necessary organizational structures and procedures in place to implement the proposed projects or programs, without delay, will be eligible for up to twenty-five points.

Award Criteria Details:

Past Performance and Timeliness: The OCR reserves the right not to issue an award to any applicant if it has been determined that the applicant is not in compliance with existing state contracts and has not taken satisfactory steps to remedy such non-compliance.

Limitations:

The regulatory term for a project with UI funds is a minimum period of five years.

Project Term Completion Dates:

Recipients of UI funding enter into a two-year (24 Month) grant agreement in which all funds must be expended and all proposed accomplishments met. Any funds remaining at the end of the two-year period are subject to reallocation.

Matching Fund Requirements / Deadlines:

UI operates as a reimbursement program. Applicants documenting high percentages of committed matching and leveraged funds will receive priority consideration. Projects that cannot be completed within a 24-month contract term will not be reimbursed.

Additional Resources:

For more information, applicants should contact New York State Homes and Community Renewal by email: HCR_CFA@nyshcr.org or by visiting: <http://www.nyshcr.org/AboutUs/Offices/CommunityRenewal/>